What We Can Do To Give Women and Families a Fair Shot at Getting Ahead

Fifty years ago most families were able to pay their bills, save for their children’s education and plan for their own retirement—all on one income. Today most women work outside the home and are either the sole breadwinner or share the role equally with their partner. Times have changed yet many of our policies remain outdated and disconnected from the challenges women face.

That’s why this summer President Obama convened the White House Summit on Working Families with the Center for American Progress and the U.S. Department of Labor. And that’s why we need to take action this August and in the months beyond. We need policies that make sense for the world we live in today so that women and families have a fair shot of getting ahead, not just getting by.

The summit was not just a single day; it was the beginning of a longer conversation and a larger movement: to reform our federal and state laws, to update our workplace practices, and to rethink how we as a society can give everyone an opportunity to get ahead. Because every American should be able to stay home with a sick child and not risk losing their job, or have the healthcare access they need. Every woman should have confidence that she is not being paid less simply because of her gender. And every American should be able to take paid time off to have a child or care for an aging parent. With the momentum from the summit we have the opportunity to drive these policies not only in Washington, D.C., but in states and cities around the country.

During the month of August, our elected representatives return home to their districts to hear from all of us. This is the time for us to tell our legislators what policies matter, ask them their positions, talk to our neighbors, grow our movement and demand action. This Action Memo gives you the tools that you need to make change in your community this August and moving forward.

Here’s what’s included:

1. **Actions you can take to support working families in your community (Page 2):**
   a. Learn which tactics you can use to take action and make a difference in your community.

2. **Policy priorities for working families (Page 4):**
   a. A look at the core policies needed to give women and families a fair shot at getting ahead. Learning this background is essential to being able to take effective action in your community.

3. **Questions to ask about support for working families (Page 7):**
   a. One of the most important actions to take is to talk to your legislator or employer. This is a list of questions to ask legislators or employers to make sure they are taking action to respond to the needs of working families, and pursue the policy solutions that we know will help families succeed.

4. **Build an event or summit in your local community (Page 10):**
   a. Use the tools in this action memo to bring together other passionate individuals to devise a coordinated state strategy.

For additional information, visit workingfamiliessummit.org to find other ways to get involved with the Working Families Summit movement. Join our online conversation using #FamiliesSucceed or #WEMatter.
Taking Action To Give Women and Families An Opportunity To Succeed

Goals:

1. **Get elected officials on record:** It is critical that we have as many elected officials as possible on the record talking about their positions on paid family leave, equal pay, paid sick days and the minimum wage.

2. **Give voice to working families:** Tell the stories of working Americans who struggle to balance work and family by lifting up their voices and making sure they have a chance to be part of the conversation.

3. **Make the campaign heard:** Promote the ideas of paid family leave, equal pay, healthcare access, caregiving flexibility and workplace equality.

4. **Bring local leaders and advocates together:** We have to build this movement together. Bringing together advocates, leaders and people who care about these issues will make us a stronger coalition and help you develop a coordinated local strategy.

**10 Things You Can Do:**

1. **Plan your own local women’s economic security summit:** People and organizations all around the country are hosting their own summits, smaller versions of the White House Summit on Working Families that took place on June 23rd. Bring together local leaders and advocates to meet and strategize about how to organize in support of local, state and national initiatives to promote policy solutions for working families.

2. **Put American Women’s Working for Families report into action:** American Women’s ‘Working for Families Report: Know Where Your Representatives Stand’ is a state-by-state guide for women and families to know where their federal representatives stand on issues such as equal pay for women and raising the minimum wage. You can find the report [here](#).

3. **Go to a town hall:** Ask your elected representatives about their support for policies to benefit working families. Go to a town hall meeting and ask about his or her position on issues affecting women and families. Video their response and post it online or send to: workingfamilies@americanprogressaction.org

4. **Working families office hours:** Schedule a visit to your representative’s office and ask whether he or she thinks that you should have access to paid family leave, paid sick days, and equal pay. Ask your representative how he or she will make that happen.
5. **Join the national day of action—Women’s Equality Day on August 26th:** National, state and local organizations across the country are participating in a day of action to commemorate the certification of the 19th Amendment on August 26, 1920. You can help make more voices heard on this day by participating in events, hosting your own or sharing your story on social media.

6. **Telling our stories:** Personal stories provide context and define why our current workplace policies often don’t work for today’s families. Identify a story – whether it’s your own, a friend’s or a member’s – and then find a local columnist or reporter who can tell that story and give voice to families who need better workplace policies.

7. **Host an event:** Host round tables, press conferences, tele-town halls or an event at a member’s office to focus attention on issues affecting working families. Your event could include an elected official or employer who supports these policies, a small business owner, an individual with a compelling personal story, or an opinion leader that could help drive press.

8. **Join the conversation online:** Share your story, push elected officials to take a position or just share the facts about why we need policies to help women and families get ahead.
   - Use **#WEmatter** to spread the message that women’s and families’ economic security matters.
   - Tweet at an elected official and thank them for their support, ask them their position or hold them accountable for not supporting these common sense policies.
   - Work with partners to focus on telling the stories of working families from your communities – lifting up voices during recess – through blog posts and engagement online with #WEmatter.
   - Share graphics across your various social media outlets.

9. **Write an op-ed:** Share your story about why we need policies that work for today’s families through an opinion piece. Op-eds from key constituents will help drive the message locally and make it clear that we need these policies. You can write your own, encourage others or work to figure out what outlets are best for op-ed placement.

10. **Join the LTE campaign:** Letters to the editor from working families can draw attention to these important issues and help call on Members of Congress to support policies that help women and families get ahead.
Background on Key Policy Priorities for Working Families

It’s time we made progress. Policies that enable women and men to respond to the dual demands of work and family, promote fair treatment in the workplace, and ensure access to quality health care are essential to the overall economic stability and well-being of families.

Work-Life Challenges and Workplace Flexibility

Paid family and medical leave:

- Nearly all workers need to take time away from work to deal with a serious personal or family illness, or to care for a new child or aging parent. Access to paid family and medical leave could allow workers to meet those needs without jeopardizing their economic security.
- The United States is the only developed country that doesn’t guarantee workers the right to earn paid time off in some form.
- In fact, only 12 percent of workers in the United States have access to paid family leave through their employers.
- A national paid family and medical leave insurance program that allows workers to continue to earn at least a portion of their pay while they take time away from work to address a serious health condition, care for a family member with a serious health condition, or care for a new child is vital to the success of working families.

Workplace flexibility:

- Women, especially women of color, are more likely to work in low-wage jobs and often have much less flexibility.
- Many women are required to work in shifts that are unpredictable and constantly changing, or are asked to work overtime with too little notice. These workers risk losing their job for taking time off when they are sick or need to care for a sick family member.
- Laws that provide workers with a “right to request” could allow workers to pursue greater flexibility from their employer without jeopardizing their job.

Caregiving:

- Millions of Americans need help caring for themselves or family members. As the country ages, the need for comprehensive, quality, and affordable long-term care will become even more urgent. For parents of young children, particularly those who are low-income, the lack of quality, affordable early childhood programs can prevent working parents from ensuring their families are cared for while they fulfill the demands of their jobs. We need policies that help working families find high-quality and sustainable child care for their children.

Paid sick days:

- Everyone gets sick, but not everyone has time to get better. Allowing employees to earn paid sick days helps keep our economy, families, and communities healthy.
- Almost 40 million U.S. employees, or about 40 percent of the nation's private-sector workforce, do not have access to paid sick days. As a result these employees go to work
sick or leave their sick children at home alone because they fear they will be fired for missing work.

- If employees choose to skip work, the loss of pay can take a toll, particularly on the low-income workers who are least likely to have access to these policies.
- Dozens of cities and states across the country have been taking the lead on pushing legislation to guarantee paid sick days for workers in their community though active campaigns and bills at the state and municipal levels.

**Fair Treatment in the Workplace**

**Equal pay:**

- While women are important breadwinners for their families, they still earn less than men do on average, making it even more difficult for today’s families to make ends meet.
- Women are the primary, sole, or co-breadwinners in nearly two-thirds of families, yet they continue to earn less than their male counterparts, with Latinas and African American women experiencing the sharpest pay disparities.
- Although the law prohibits unequal pay for equal work, there is more we need to do to ensure that both women and men enjoy the fullest protections against discrimination. We need to take steps to strengthen existing protections, promote greater transparency in pay practices, and remove loopholes that enable bad actors to avoid being held accountable.

**Minimum wage:**

- Women make up a disproportionate share of low-wage workers. Raising the minimum wage will help hardworking women better support their families.
- Women made up approximately 2/3 of all minimum wage workers in 2012. The current federal minimum wage is $7.25 an hour, which means someone working fulltime earns $15,080 a year. That is below the poverty rate for a family of three.
- Increasing the minimum wage to $10.10 would boost wages for about 15 million women and help close the wage gap.

**Pregnancy discrimination:**

- About 75 percent of the 68.6 million women working in the United States will become pregnant at some point in their lives. Even with longstanding protections against pregnancy discrimination, too many women continue to face unfair practices that limit their job opportunities or career advancement.
- Efforts at the federal and state level would strengthen existing laws to make clear that women should not risk losing their job just because they need a temporary accommodation at work due to pregnancy.
Healthy Families & Nondiscrimination

Access to preventive healthcare without co-payments:
- In a 5-4 decision in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby*, five conservative male justices on the Supreme Court gave unprecedented power to closely-held, for-profit, secular corporations to make health care decisions for their female employees.
- In the wake of the recent decision, a minority of Senators blocked the “Not My Boss’ Business Act,” which would have reversed the *Hobby Lobby* ruling and many states are introducing their own state bills to protect access to contraception.
- Every legislator should be asked to address whether they believe that women should be prevented from controlling their own health care decisions.

Close the Medicaid coverage gap:
- The goal of the Affordable Care Act is to provide quality, affordable insurance to every American— and it’s working. However, 24 states have not taken full advantage of the law because they have not accepted federal funds to expand Medicaid.
- As a result, 5 million people have fallen into a coverage gap because they earn too much to qualify for traditional Medicaid, and not enough to have access to tax credits to lower their costs, making premiums unaffordable.
Checklist

QUESTIONS ABOUT SUPPORT FOR SOLUTIONS TO STRENGTHEN WORKING FAMILIES

Promoting workplace flexibility and ensuring women and men can respond to their work and family obligations:

- Do you believe women and men should have to choose between caring for their families and earning a decent wage?

- What steps have you taken or supported to ensure that women and men have access to paid leave so that they can take time off when needed to care for their families or themselves? Should paid leave be an important priority?

- What steps would you take to ensure that paid leave is available to all workers not just high-level managers or based on employer preference? Would you support requiring employers to provide some form of paid leave, or only voluntary measures that would not ensure uniform access to paid leave?

Advancing fairness in the workplace and ensuring fair pay practices:

- What steps are you taking to ensure women are paid fairly for their work? Do you believe the lack of equal pay is a problem facing women in the workplace? What specific policies do you support?

- Are there equal pay proposals that you do not support or have not supported, and if so, why? Have you voted against or voted against considering an equal pay proposal, and if so, why?

- Do you believe that women still face discrimination in the workplace or is it a problem of the past? Is there more that needs to be done to ensure women are treated fairly on the job? What specific steps do you support to ensure women and men are treated fairly in the workplace?

- How will you ensure that women and men are not treated unfairly simply because of their caregiving responsibilities? What steps are you taking to ensure men and women are not discouraged from, or penalized for, assuming caregiving responsibilities in their families?

- Do you believe that women lose out on job opportunities because they are or might become pregnant? If so, what steps are you taking to address this problem?
A minimum wage worker has a budget of $77 each week for food, transportation and entertainment. Could you live off of that each week?

If we raised the minimum wage, workers would have more money to spend in our businesses. Wouldn’t that help grow our economy and create more jobs?

Do you believe that businesses should be able to deny services to LGBT populations? If not, what steps should be taken to prevent this from happening?

**Expanding opportunities for women and ensuring women have a fair chance to advance, succeed, and take on leadership roles:**

- Do you believe women’s leadership is important? Do you believe women face barriers to advancement in the workplace? What steps are you taking to ensure women have access to leadership opportunities?

- Do you support efforts to increase the number of women in decision-making positions? What types of policies do you support?

**Ensuring access to healthcare for all under the Affordable Care Act:**

- Do you believe that businesses and corporations like Hobby Lobby should be able to deny insurance coverage with no additional co-payments for preventive health services such as contraception? If not, how can we protect these important health benefits for women?

- Do you want to repeal the Affordable Care Act? Does that mean you want insurance companies to be able to charge a woman more just because of her gender?

- There are nearly 5 million people who could have access to affordable healthcare but can’t because state lawmakers have refused to close the Medicaid coverage gap. Do you support closing the coverage gap? If not, where would you tell those millions of people to get the care they need?
Planning your own summit or event

Women’s Economic Security summits are state-specific events focused on bringing together influential organizing groups, local elected officials and activists to help coalition-build, plan, and educate and train new and experienced organizers on how they can build a campaign for economic security and opportunity for hardworking women and families. Summits can feature a federal and state strategy panel, keynote from a policy champion, messaging training, breakout sessions on different ways to advocate for women and families and state specific materials to ensure each state has what they need to effectively continue the fight for policies protecting women and families post-summit.

If you are interested in building your own local women’s economic security summit, please contact workingfamilies@americanprogressaction.org and we will help you!

Getting Started

- Who should be a part of the day? Create a “planning committee” to help determine who to invite to speak and participate in the event.
- Pick a date and a venue – check with your coalition partners to make sure that day works for them.
- Create a “Save the Date” and start inviting participants and attendees.

What We Can Supply

- Template agenda
- Template power point materials
- Policies to move in your state
- Action items
- Support, guidance and a checklist to help you manage and create your own summit

How To Build A Successful Event

1. Know the turf and manage time efficiently.
   - Where is the event? Will it be held on public or private property? Is the surrounding area rural, urban, or suburban? What is the current political climate?
   - How much organized support can you expect?
   - Where can you work? Where can you access WiFi if necessary?
   - How active is the opposition in the area? Will they organize in response?
   - Make a “To-Do” list every night for the next day. Schedule out your time.

2. Reach out to allies via phone and email.
   - Make a list of every organizational contact in the state that can potentially help you. Start calling and emailing them.
   - Keep track of who you’ve contacted and how.
   - Always call if you have a phone number. Email should be supplemental.
   - Follow up each phone contact with an email.
• Create a PDF with relevant event information that you can email out to all of your contacts. This will save you time.

• Be Persistent. If you don’t reach an important contact on the first attempt, try again until you do. Each contact should get three phone calls on the first day before you leave a message. Call each day until you reach him/her.

• Stories at Your Event: There is nothing stronger and more effective than hearing from people who would be directly impacted by harmful policies that ignore the challenges facing women and their families. As often as possible events should include a “real person” who can share their own story about why they need better workplace policies.

3. Work with your allies.

• Ask local allied groups to mobilize their members.

• Ask the staff of allied local state representatives and state senators if they have lists of volunteers and supporters they’d reach out to.

• Get in touch with field staffers from recent progressive campaigns. They often have lists of past volunteers and the most up-to-date information on local activists.

• Who are your leaders on the ground? Give people specific responsibilities and goals.